



Commandant's Note

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THE INFANTRY SQUAD—HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

As we prepare to enter the next century, the Infantry will continue to shoulder the responsibility for much of the Army's mission in the immediate future and beyond. We will execute peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and other stability and support operations around the world, and the Infantryman and Infantry small units will be the ones who will draw—and enforce—the line in the sand. The Infantry rifle squad will remain the cornerstone of the force, and in this issue's Commandant's Note, I want to share some of our thoughts on the size of the Infantry squad, and I invite you to think about it and give us your recommendations.

The Infantry fight is a close, brutal, and personal gunfight in which victory goes to the side that can seize and retain the initiative, normally turning on the skill and will of the squad. Accuracy and volume of fire are parts of that equation, and the squad must be large enough at the outset to be able to gain and maintain firepower advantage, even with losses. Until 1983, an Infantry squad had eleven Soldiers, but in that year it was reduced to nine men, an 18 percent decrease. This reduction meant that the squad—and hence the platoon—was less able to conduct fire and maneuver, man key weapons, and remain combat effective while sustaining casualties. In effect, rifle Infantry had lost its resiliency.

A basic squad consists of the squad leader and two or more teams. A team conducts individual fire and movement within the team, along a common axis. The squad, on the other hand, can employ a team to provide a base of fire on one axis to fix the enemy, while a second team conducts fire and movement while maneuvering against the enemy along a different axis. The concept of fire and maneuver is not a new one; it is a fundamental principle of squad tactics and has long been employed by Infantry small unit leaders as they press the close fight against an adversary.

The eleven-man squad concept had its origin in the bitter lessons of the Korean War, where battles were won or lost at platoon and squad level. The greatest strength of this earlier eleven-man squad structure lay in its flexibility and robust nature. The squad consisted of a squad leader and two fire teams, each with a team leader, an automatic rifleman, and three riflemen. This structure was retained during the Vietnam War, but with one of the riflemen in each team being replaced with a grenadier.

Today, Infantry battalion modified tables of organization and equipment authorize nine-man Infantry squads for units at ALO 1, while authorizing eight and seven men for ALO 2 and 3 units, respectively; all Infantry squads—including ALO 2 and 3—should be authorized a minimum of

nine Soldiers, the same as for current ALO 1 units.

We at the Infantry School believe that the absolute minimum number required to operate as a Light, Mechanized, Airborne, Air Assault, or Ranger Infantry squad is seven men. A squad of fewer than seven would in effect be little more than a big fire team, only capable of conducting limited fire and movement. Such a unit would rapidly become less effective as it sustained casualties, and could not tolerate any diversion of Soldiers from their primary duties as squad members. Fewer than seven men in a squad is not a viable option.

When the Infantry squad was reduced to nine members in 1983, we essentially replaced a robust, flexible squad and platoon organization with a fragile one whose ability to execute the same diverse array of missions is at risk. In many cases, commanders have decided to train Infantry squads of fewer than seven soldiers, for a variety of reasons, but squads forced to operate at such low manning levels are not organized or equipped to fight in accordance with today's doctrine.

All Infantry squads share common tasks and therefore a common basic organization, common doctrine, and a common leadership ratio. All Infantry platoons should likewise have three squads plus an antitank capability and the ability to lay down a base of fire. Beyond this, they begin to

differ. The mechanized platoon's base of fire is provided by the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV), and the platoon does not need machinegun teams as much as they need rifle teams to cover ground, clear restrictive terrain, conduct patrols, and perform other essential tasks. Light type Infantry platoons (Airborne, Air Assault, Ranger, and Light) on the other hand, have a greater need for machinegun teams, and should have either the same base-of-fire capability or a weapons squad.

The bottom line is that Infantry platoons need resiliency in terms of both rifle strength and their ability to provide a base of fire. This can best be accomplished with an eleven-man squad, plus either a BFV or a weapons squad, depending on whether the unit is heavy or light. The Infantry squad must be able to fight doctrinally with all key weapons and positions manned if it is to be successful in sustained combat operations.

For our part, we must realistically define our Infantry requirements before we make any recommendations, and that can be done only with input from the field, from those of you who have to balance missions against resources on a daily basis. We need your help and input on this important issue. Send your comments to enor@benning-emh2.army.mil.

Hooah!

